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## *BPA funds Solar Data Center*

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### **Bonneville Power Administration**

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**PORTLAND, Ore.** – The Bonneville Power Administration will provide nearly \$900,000 in funding over five years to the Regional Solar Radiation Data Center, Administrator Judi Johansen announced today. The center, operated by the University of Oregon, collects high-quality long-term solar radiation data from 13 sites in the Pacific Northwest.

"The program has been collecting solar radiation data since 1977 but has been inadequately funded of late," Johansen said. "Funding this program demonstrates BPA's commitment to the development of renewable resources under the Northwest Power Act."

Frank Vignola, director of the university's solar energy center, said, "BPA's funding will give a big boost to the program and help us achieve many of our goals. It will enable us to add new monitoring sites and produce software and Internet tools to facilitate use of the data."

The center also contributes data to the National Solar Radiation Data Base run by the National Renewable Energy Laboratory.

The Eugene Water & Electric Board and Portland General Electric will continue to contribute about \$25,000 and \$17,200 per year, respectively, to the program. The Northwest Power Planning Council also helps to fund the program.

Solar data collection is to solar resource development as stream gauging is to hydropower. A minimum of 15 and preferably 30 years of data are needed to characterize the climate in an area because of short-term or cyclical weather patterns.

The Energy Information Administration projects a 9.2 percent annual growth rate in the use of solar power to generate electricity over the next decade, with robust growth expected for off-grid and distributed applications of photovoltaics. As solar energy becomes more economical, the demand for high-quality data will increase. Because data collection requires a long-term effort and has uncertain future benefits, it is difficult for an individual utility to justify the expense.

In the early 1980s, BPA sponsored collection, analysis, reporting and archiving of solar data obtained from several locations in the Pacific Northwest. That effort was abandoned in 1985 due to the temporary

surplus of energy resources available at that time but was reinstated in 1994. From 1994 to the present, the Regional Solar Radiation Monitoring Project has been operated by the University of Oregon, with funding from a consortium of utilities, including BPA. Because some utilities have left the consortium, the university has had to subsidize and downsize the project and to continuously search for other sources of funding.

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